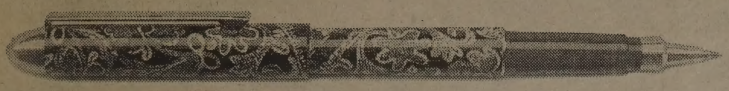


*Your Turn by F. Mike Miles*

# *Lever* Flap a Chance to Walk Our Talk

Some members of this community have deemed "inappropriate" a Palmer High School student newspaper article about the difficulties of being a gay or lesbian teenager. The board of directors for the Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition finds such censure unjust and unsound. We find consideration by the District 11 School Board to restrict similar articles to be damaging to constitutional democracy and to education's greater good.

We can all breathe a sigh of relief that School District 11 has passed its bond issue. But what kind of climate shall exist in the newly renovated buildings? Will it be an academic environment in which students are taught to disparage or repress any idea that takes them out of their comfort zone? Will it be an environment in which students are taught that it is OK to disregard the rights of certain minorities? If so, the community will have passed the bond issue for naught, for no well-kept facility or high-tech equipment will truly educate students if we fail to instill in them a love of knowledge, respect for the unknown or unfamiliar, and an appreciation for the diverse perspectives that populate this increasingly interdependent world.

A good education does not come easy. Teachers should not avoid controversial topics when those topics matter, when they are relevant to a child's education. Indeed, challenges to one's mindset — some cognitive dissonance — is healthy. Intolerance starts by repressing information; hatred grows from denying that a group of people, like homosexuals, share in our constitutional democracy.

Opponents of homosexuality will say that a student is easily influenced during his or her middle and high school years, that society must somehow protect them against "inappropriate" ideas. Educators, however, must protect our students against ignorance and bigotry. It is precisely because a student's world view is being shaped that we have an obligation to teach the nature of human rights, the hard-won lessons of the 14th Amendment, the importance of tolerance and of entertaining concepts that may be foreign to our own experience.

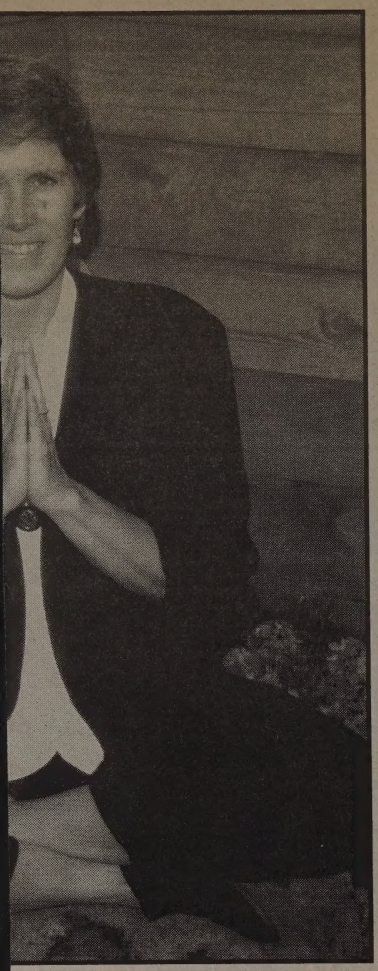
When debating controversial issues, students should be forced to argue the side they don't agree with — not in order to change their minds, but in order to teach them to consider other points of view. When students want to publish controversial articles like finding gay love, the school should print it and then publish well-argued letters to the editor that give a different point of view.

Of course, not everything is off-limits to censorship, and educators must use their judgment. But intellectual comfort is not a criterion for teaching kids things that will help them succeed in life.

The HRC Board hopes the D-11 School Board will demonstrate true leadership and make an unequivocal statement supporting the rights of homosexuals to express their views. For this is not only an issue for Palmer High School or District 11, it is an issue for the entire community of Colorado Springs.

We are not "the hate city," and it is time to "walk the talk."

*Mike Miles is vice chair of the board of the Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition. For information on the HRC, call 477-0130.*



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